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“Think Globally, Act Locally”: Successes and Improvements of the BSU Summer Teaching Program in Shanghai, China 2018

Jabbar Al-Obaidi & Chien Wen Yu

As the tenth largest university in Massachusetts, Bridgewater State University always strives to offer educational and cultural opportunities for students, faculty, and staff, while focusing its efforts on internationalizing the curriculum. From July 2 through August 2, 2018, eight faculty members from the Departments of Accounting, Art and Art History, Communication Studies, English, History, Management, Philosophy, and Psychology joined an international summer program offered by the College of Continuing Studies (CCS) in collaboration with Massachusetts Education International (MEI) and ONPS, a partner organization in China with MEI in Boston for summer 2017 and summer 2018.

According to ONPS's On-Site Coordinator in Shanghai, “Students attending affiliated universities, they continue their degrees earning points/credits and return to their schools in September academically enhanced. This program was set up for the United States and Canada to great success.”¹ The majority of the Chinese students who were enrolled in the program came from Canadian institutions. The idea of internationalizing the campus and providing global windows for BSU faculty to travel abroad to teach, conduct research, and explore other cultures and educational systems is not new. This program is actually one of the examples of overseas teaching and research collaboration among faculty from different departments and aimed at exploring the Chinese culture and educational systems.

This article discusses the academic and educational potentials for the international summer program offered by Bridgewater State University in Shanghai. Through our teaching experience and conversation with faculty participants and students, we were able to recommend practical ways to improve summer program course offerings in summer 2019 to

the administration and management in Shanghai and to suggest how to enhance and expand its intercultural experiences. We think that Bridgewater State University's Summer Program in Shanghai is a unique opportunity for BSU faculty to experience teaching courses abroad to Chinese students, utilizing American pedagogy, and instructional technology. Enrolled students obtained transferable credits to their institutions in China, Canada and the U.S. It's a win-win situation for faculty and for students as well.

Both of us participated in the program and taught four courses in the areas of management and communication from July 2 through August 2, 2017. We were interested in knowing the level of the Chinese students' engagement in the program and to collect their thoughts to improve the international program in summer 2019. Accordingly, we held many conversations with students about the program. In addition, we asked students basic questions to survey their reactions and encourage their evaluation of the program. The survey contained seven closed questions with multiple choices, and one open-ended question, which called for a brief comment. The survey was administered during the period of July 25–31.

About 50 students were enrolled in the program. Most students chose one answer for each of the open questions, while others chose more than one answer.



End of summer program celebration (Photo credit: ONPS)



Summer program on-site leaders (Photo credit: ONPS)

Table 1 — Reasons for Choosing ONPS-Bridgewater State University, Shanghai

Why do you want to study at ONPS-Bridgewater State University Shanghai?	
Convenient Location	21
Affordable tuition	2
Wide range of course offerings	8
American and Canadian university recognized credits for transfer	25
Total responses	56

Table 2 — Number of Courses Chosen in July 2-August 2, 2018

How many courses are you taking?	
One	7
Two	27
Three	19
More	0
Total responses	53

27 students took two courses while 19 students took three courses. ONPS encourages students to take more courses and gives tuition breaks for two and three courses. Most of the students choose to take only two classes because of the workload, home assignments, and tests associated with each course. Only 7 students took one course. The reason may be that they live at home in Shanghai and do not have the pressure of paying for living expenses as students from other cities who pay both their transportation to come and hotel expenses to stay in Shanghai. The more courses students from other cities take, the more money they save for tuition and living expenses.

Table 3 — Suggested Number of Courses in the Future

How many courses would you like to take in the future?	
None	5
One	12
Two	20
Three	11
More	4
Total responses	52

As global educators and leaders, the substantial comments provided by students regarding the number of courses offered by BSU, and teaching pedagogy encouraged us to propose multidisciplinary courses to benefit students to use these courses for both required and elective courses.

Table 4 — Preferred Teaching Methodology and Style

What kind of teaching style do you like?	
Lecture	8
Discussion	7
Lecture and discussion	17
Lecture, discussion and multimedia	23
Total responses	55

All Chinese students in the summer program had been studying at American and Canadian universities and were therefore familiar with Western learning and teaching styles. Unlike those Chinese students who had never studied abroad and preferred the lecture style, they were vocal and active in class participation. 17 students

preferred lecture and discussion style whereas 23 students preferred lecture, discussion and multimedia style. They liked to see YouTube videos and multimedia tools as supplements to the lecture and discussion in the U.S. and Canadian classrooms. Google/YouTube is not legal or available in China. It makes it difficult for our professors to show American videos that they have prepared for their classes. Technology and internet in the Chinese classroom becomes a big challenge for the professors. Such technical and regulatory obstacles could be navigated in two ways: working with the information technology division to draw a plan for embedding teaching instructional technology prior to travel abroad; and to enable international enrolled students access without any difficulties. One of the most popular are virtual private networks, VPNs, which encrypt educational content, or any content for that matter, and makes it hard to block and monitor. It's a big challenge for educators and students, however, yet, it's a great opportunity for teaching and learning.

Table 5 — Types and Levels of Courses Offered in Shanghai Location 2018

What courses are you taking?	
Science and business courses	25
Liberal arts courses	20
Lower-level courses	11
Upper-level courses	13
Total responses	69

Students were almost evenly divided in taking science, business as well as liberal arts courses. 25 students took science and business courses, and 20 students took liberal arts courses. The highest number of students enrolled in any one program was concentrated on two psychology courses. The next highest number of students enrolled was in a business class. Students were almost evenly divided in taking lower-level courses and upper-level courses. Professors found that students who took upper-level courses were not so

well prepared or trained in prerequisite lower-level classes at their home universities in the U.S. and Canada.

Table 6 — Preferred Courses in the Future

What courses would you like to take in the future?	
Science and business courses	24
Liberal arts courses	9
Lower-level courses	5
Upper-level courses	23
Total responses	61

For future summer courses, students would like to take more science and business courses, and more upper-level courses. 24 students plan to take science and business courses. 23 students plan to take upper-level courses. Most of these students in the program are sophomores and juniors, and have already finished their basic and lower-level courses at their home institutions. However, it is difficult for BSU to offer equivalent upper-level courses to match those of student home institutions for transfer credits. It is also difficult to have a high enrollment number for each upper-level class. For summer classes, sophomores and juniors are main sources of student enrollment. To find a good combination of science and business courses with upper-level courses will be helpful to the future summer sessions. Taking these observations into consideration serve several



Dr. Laura McAlinden with her student (Photo credit: ONPS)

purposes: increasing the number of enrollments in the courses; allowing more BSU faculty to participate and to teach a variety of courses; and it's a reliable strategy for marketing BSU global education and programs.

Table 7 — Goals and Accomplishments

What do you want to accomplish by taking classes at ONPS-BSU, Shanghai?	
Taking class credits for transfer	44
Making friends with classmates	16
Meeting faculty for career and graduate study advice and opportunities	9
Studying and living in Shanghai	11
Total responses	80

44 students wanted to take class credits to transfer to their home universities and colleges in the U.S. and Canada. All of these students had long summer vacations of three or four months in

China. It would be of great benefit for them to make use of the time visiting families and taking summer classes in China at the same time. When they can get the same kind of Western education and transfer credits back to their home universities, they feel that their summer vacation would be worthwhile in China. While taking summer classes, they would like to make friends with classmates and establish social networks. Meeting faculty and getting advice/recommendations for graduate school would also be important to them. Studying and living in Shanghai is exciting and like a vacation within a summer vacation for students. It is one of the reasons they attended the Bridgewater State University summer program in Shanghai.

Program Improvements

In the last open-ended question, the surveyed students offered valuable suggestions to improve the program. Students preferred to have more upper-level courses to augment their home school majors and programs. They voiced their opinions and recommended a change in the way classes were scheduled for both the morning and the afternoon slots. Participants compared the various programs offered by ONPS in collaboration with other American institutions, and concluded that classes at Bridgewater State University Shanghai are perceived as difficult and demanding; there are



Professors learning to paint Chinese fans in an organized cultural class (Photo credit: ONPS)

We think that Bridgewater State University's Summer Program in Shanghai is a unique opportunity for BSU faculty to experience teaching courses abroad to Chinese students.



Dr. Chien Wen Yu with his students (Author's collection)

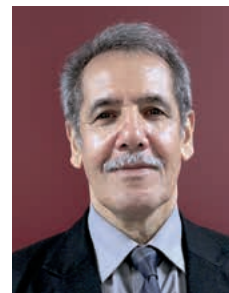
too many homework assignments; tests and exams are hard; test score averages are low in the 60s. To overcome these difficulties, students suggested that professors should offer a comprehensive session to review the materials included in the scheduled quizzes and major exams. Students indicated that class time of ninety minutes was rather long. Class time should be cut shorter. They expressed their fear either to fail the course or to get a below "C" grade. Grades lower than "C" or score of less than 70 will not be accepted as transfer credits by Canadian universities. Although, the "C" grade is not an issue for the Chinese students who came from the U.S. institutions, it is still a critical issue for those who are enrolled in the Canadian schools. Therefore, it should be addressed by the faculty of Bridgewater State University. This issue can be resolved by offering classes over the week from Mondays through Fridays and to use Summer

Session I and Summer Session II as a teaching model.

As for other concerns, students stated that their time outside class and study is boring and routine. They asked for cultural and social activities so that they can interact with their colleagues and professors, and to have a fun time. Furthermore, students recommended that ONPS should find a better hotel as the hotel that they stayed in over the five weeks was far away from the city center and attractions.

The Bridgewater State University summer program in Shanghai seems attractive to students from different parts of China. Student home universities and colleges in the U.S. and Canada have no issue with recognizing, accepting, and transferring credits from other American institutions such as Bridgewater State University, and Canadian university summer programs. Although other university summer programs in China hire foreign professors

to teach courses in English, they still provide only Chinese university transcripts to Chinese summer schools. Some U.S. and Canadian universities declined to accept transferring credits from any other summer program even if the teachers were from reputable U.S. and Canadian schools. For quality assurance and accountability, acceptable and transferable credits must come from the U.S. or Canadian colleges and universities. Despite the fact that surveyed students highlighted the level of difficulty or the rigorous academic demands by the faculty who taught BSU courses in summer, Shanghai 2018, they didn't view it as an insurmountable challenge. Pedagogically speaking, students' requests to allocate reasonable time to review the materials included in the scheduled exams or quizzes is legitimate and useful. Bridgewater State University prides itself as a teaching institution with a core responsibility to promote student success. The BSU summer program in China is open to designing better learning experiences for those who matter most: the students.



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